

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, February 20, 2008

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MIRS

February 15, 2008

Spade and Clack on DHS

The Department of Human Services has taken some hefty hits in a lawsuit recently, and two key democrats want DHS to testify on what's going on regarding the foster care program.

Rep. Dudley **SPADE** (D-Tipton), who chairs the Human Services budget subcommittee, and Rep. Brenda

CLACK (D-Flint), who runs the Family and Child Services committee, will schedule a joint hearing on allegations that foster care kids are at risk.

“The report certainly indicates that,” Spade tells *MIRS* as he expresses his concerns over testimony in a

law suit brought by a child advocacy group against the state.

“When I see the department intentionally using misleading methods to report its rate of mal-treatment...

some of the findings are troubling,” and that is cause for concern Spade said.

DHS officials are trying to discredit the outside consultant that did the study on behalf of the plaintiffs in

the case claiming the conclusions are wrong.

No dates have been set for the joint hearing.

*(Contributed by Senior Capitol Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK**.)*

Michigan Report

February 19, 2008

D.H.S. OUTLINES SAFETY, WELL BEING FOCUS ON CHILDREN IN YEAR TO COME

As its deputy director on Tuesday shared the Department of Human Services' optimistic goals surrounding foster care, bringing in more federal funding and tying up loose ends in the juvenile justice system with the House DHS Appropriations Subcommittee, she said the department has a heightened focus that will guide "everything" DHS does going forward. "Safety, well-being and permanency is the focus of everything we do going forward," said DHS Deputy Director Kathryne O'Grady, adding that that goal is in line with the federal child and family services review goal. A few inclusions to this year's budget should help DHS meet its goal, Ms. O'Grady said, including the \$2.5 million that the department hopes to use to license more than 1,000 new relative foster care providers within FY 2008, making it financially possible for more families to take in children who may otherwise end up in the foster care system.

The budget also transferred many adoption cases to private agencies, saving state resources.

However, Ms. O'Grady said, the department is concerned about private agencies' ability to deliver services, since their current caseload of 1,682 adoption cases is expected to double.

Since the state doesn't reimburse private companies until after services are delivered, many agencies may not be able to handle the additional staff, space and training needs that referrals may bring on, she said.

To avoid transferring too many cases to areas that can't handle them, DHS plans to work with private agencies to determine how many cases to transfer to each agency.

On the order of maximizing federal funding, DHS will open the Compliance and Accountability office, which will include five new central office positions and 100 field office positions to ensure the department follows best practices and a centralized approach to child services and Title IV-E (federal) funding.

Wayne County, which will have 21 of the field positions, expects to start hiring as soon as next week.

MAXEY CLOSING UPDATE: Since the 80-person-capacity Maxey Training School was ordered closed last November, DHS has been

scrambling to find a place to put the 60 boys who were then housed in the facility.

As of Tuesday, 10 boys have been released or transferred to another program or facility and 25 are expected to complete their program or be transferred to a lower security facility by the May 1 closure deadline.

For the remaining 25, there are several challenges to getting them out of the facility, said DHS Deputy Director Kathryne O'Grady, including that 15 are sex offenders, 10 are chronic offenders and 20 require mental health services.

Further complicating the process of finding a place for those 25, Ms. O'Grady said, is that Maxey's high security facility is already 10 over capacity with 80 people housed there and nine people on the waiting list. And instead of transferring some of those youths at Maxey's high security program to lower security facilities, judges are keeping them where they are or sometimes transferring them to Maxey high security from other, lower security programs.

Ms. O'Grady said DHS plans to meet with the courts to ensure that they know the department's position and time constraints on moving youths out of Maxey's medium security facility.

As for staff, there are still 120 employees who will need to find another job by May or will be laid off.



GRAND TRAVERSE HERALD

Initiative fosters support for youth

By Carol South

Herald contributing writer

—

A foster youth's 18th birthday means they are aged out, turned loose as adults and their case file closed.

The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative has a mission to help make this abrupt transition easier while also advocating for systemic changes in how the state manages foster care.

In northwest Michigan, the program serves 110 youth ages 14-23 in a ten-county area. It is one of two initiatives statewide, the rural version of a pilot that also features an urban initiative based in Wayne County.

The first coordinator for the Traverse City-based office began in 2002, launching an outreach to an unserved, and often forgotten about, slice of the population. The concept and funding spring from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs, two leading foundations dedicated to the well-being of children and youth. The idea is to link people and resources to help foster youth get an education, find jobs and obtain health care and housing.

One key facet of the initiative is that the program is not about adults telling the young people what to do. Instead, foster youth in their late teens and early 20s provide input through leadership boards and also advocate at the local and state level for systemic improvements to the foster care system.

"The youth leadership boards are taking this program to the highest potential," said Shawn Semelsberger, a student intern and youth advocate who herself aged out of foster care. "The youth form their own community and peer network. They provide to some extent not a parental role but kind of like a family; you can acquire the feel of a family and that's a good thing."

Semelsberger is a member of the youth leadership board based in Traverse City; there are also boards in Cadillac and Petoskey. One policy level change is that the Medicaid coverage for foster youth has been extended to 21 instead of 18 in part because of youth involvement.

"These youth are their own best advocate," noted Marco Dedenbach, community partnership coordinator for the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative.

While devoted to making changes that will improve things for those still in the system -- having found herself addressing large audiences of child welfare professionals as well as state legislators -- Semelsberger also takes a larger perspective.

"Policy reform takes time, it doesn't happen overnight but we're well on our way to making changes," she said.

The sense of a safety net provided by parents or extended families is missing for foster youth. Hitting 18, many lose their homes and, sometimes, their opportunity to complete a high school diploma. Large and small supports and services provided by families in the area of higher education, applying for financial aid, finding and furnishing a living space and more are often unavailable to foster youth.

The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative is there to bridge that gap.

One recent example was a duffel bag drive for kids moving from home to home, where the community donated so many items that there is a stockpile for future needs. Also, a hope chest program provides household basics that a youth might not be able to afford. A new mentoring program will provide one-on-one caring by an adult to foster youth.

Another piece of the support puzzle is to help foster youth believe in themselves enough to go to college or trade school.

Jodie Annis, the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative education planner, added in January a dozen new college students to the ten on her roster. Annis helps the student navigate the application process, manage financial aid, find housing and other details of high education. She also runs a monthly support group for these students.

"We come up with different tools that will help them stay in college and get the degrees they are working towards," she said.

For more information on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, see the Web site www.jimcaseyyouth.org.

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Photos



The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative is a Department of Human Services program -- one of only two in Michigan -- that serves foster youth who age out of the system on their 18th birthday. Some of the people involved in both helping and listening to these young people are, clockwise from bottom left, Marco Dedenbach, community partnership coordinator, Brenda Kalchik, youth coordinator, Shawn Semelsberger, a student intern and youth advocate, and Michael Pavlov, Family to Family coordinator. Herald Photo

Father to stand trial for rape

Posted by [Steven Hepker](#) | [Citizen Patriot](#)

February 20, 2008 09:34AM

A judge concluded a former Army paratrooper from Columbia Township was the logical culprit in the sexual assault and beating of his 3-month-old daughter.

"The court finds this was an intentional act," District Judge R. Darryl Mazur said Tuesday at the end of a two-day preliminary hearing for Kirk Coleman.



Coleman

Circuit Judge John McBain will arraign Coleman on March 18 on charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and first-degree child abuse.

Prosecutors and Blackman Township investigators allege Coleman, 27, assaulted the baby on several occasions in September while his wife, Ashley Rogers, was away from their apartment.

The girl suffered 17 broken bones, a fractured skull and bleeding on the brain, and faces extensive therapy for brain damage and other injuries.

Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates said that in the day leading up to the girl's hospitalization Sept. 14, Coleman was the only person alone with his daughter.

Defense attorney Dennis Hurst argued Coleman never admitted to assaulting the girl, and that, at most, Coleman should be tried for second-degree child abuse. The reason, he said, was that Coleman blacked out on rum and painkillers every day and would awaken to find the baby bruised.

"The statute says you must knowingly or intentionally cause harm," Hurst argued. "He would have been blacked out."

Alcohol and drug abuse is not a defense, Bates countered.

Detective Chris Boulter, the lead investigator, testified that Coleman claimed he drank Captain Morgan rum and swallowed Darvaset painkillers to numb his memories of fighting in Iraq.

"He said he felt helpless, that he was depressed," Boulter said of his Sept. 15 interview at the University of Michigan Hospital.

The next day, as their daughter struggled on a ventilator, Coleman handed Rogers a note. Boulter said Coleman wrote that he loved Rogers, and that he was sorry. "I can't believe this is who I am," the note read.

Police arrested Coleman that night.

Under questioning by Hurst, Boulter and Children's Protective Services investigator Joyce Mansfield both said Coleman did not make any direct statements about assaulting his daughter.

"Vaguely, he said there was no other logical explanation," except that he attacked the girl in a drunken, drugged state, Boulter said.

Mansfield testified that Rogers, too, admitted she was depressed and drank alcohol excessively after the baby was born June 11.

The couple, who met in North Carolina where Coleman was stationed at Fort Bragg, married two weeks after the birth. She filed divorce papers in late September.

The now 8-month-old girl lives with Rogers' mother, a North Carolina resident who moved here temporarily. Rogers is allowed court-ordered visits, and is working toward eventually moving back to North Carolina with her mother and child.

Coleman served two tours of duty in Iraq, the last ending in January 2006. He had been working as a painter in Jackson when he was arrested.

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Article published Feb 17, 2008

Adoptive dad fathered her child, woman testifies

By Karen Smith
STAFF WRITER

A 43-year-old Berkley man faces trial in Oakland County Circuit Court on charges he had sex with his adopted daughter, fathering a child with her when she was 17.

Gerald Dale Snapp was bound over for trial on eight felony counts during a preliminary examination Tuesday in 45A District Court. He is being held on a \$1.5 million cash bond, which Judge William R. Sauer continued.

The adopted daughter testified during the preliminary exam that Snapp, an employee of the Michigan Department of Human Services at the time of his arrest, sexually assaulted her on three occasions - twice when she was 15 and another time when she 16 - while she was a foster child living in his home on Cummings. She testified he then had intercourse with her after she was adopted by him in September 2003, which resulted in her becoming pregnant with a daughter, now 3.

DNA TESTING

"He just said, 'Shhh. Don't scream.' I was quiet. I told him no, leave me alone," she said, describing the 2003 attack in a basement bedroom, where she had been sleeping alone while other family members, including her adoptive mother, were in bed upstairs.

DNA testing determined with 99.99 percent certainty that Snapp is the 3-year-old's father, according to a document submitted for evidence.

The adopted daughter, now 22, said a friend told police about the assaults when she was a minor, though she testified she denied being sexually abused when an officer showed up at the house to investigate. She said she told the officer her younger sisters, Snapp's two biological children, were being abused. "I told him the girls were, not me," she said.

She said she didn't tell police about the 2003 attack that resulted in her becoming pregnant when it happened, but she did tell her adoptive mother "on and off" about the alleged assaults.

CHARGES BROUGHT

"I didn't want Gerry to be put in jail," she testified, also adding she didn't know how to go about notifying authorities. "I didn't want to ruin his family."

She said she later changed her mind about pressing charges.

Police learned of the allegations following an interview of the 3-year-old at Care House in Pontiac, an agency that works to prevent child abuse and neglect, Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Robert Giles said. Though the daughter was 17 and an adult when impregnated, Snapp's relationship to her as her adoptive father and his allegedly forcing himself on her made it a crime, Giles said.

"The judge did the right thing," he said of his decision to bind the case over to Circuit Court and continue the bond.

CREDIBILITY QUESTIONED

Defense attorney Jerome Sabotta, who asked for some of the charges to be dropped and for the bond to be reduced to \$10,000, or 10 percent, argued the prosecutor hadn't met the burden of proof that the assaults when the daughter was a minor occurred. "Her credibility is in question," he said.

He asked the daughter if she made the allegations because of a fight over custody of the 3-year-old, which she denied. "Gerry said ... he wanted to have her on weekends. He never told me he wanted custody," she said.

The adoptive daughter was the only witness to testify.

Snapp's wife was excused from testifying because of the possibility of self-incrimination.

The remaining children - the two biological daughters and an adopted son - have been removed from the home and a neglect petition has been filed, Giles said.

Snapp, who did not deal directly with children in his job with the state, is expected to be arraigned in circuit court at 1 p.m. Feb. 28. The case has been assigned to Judge Mark Goldsmith.

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Lowell officer pleads guilty to abuse, quits job

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

By John Tunison

The Grand Rapids Press

ALLEGAN -- A Lowell police officer accused of molesting a teenage friend six years ago at an Allegan County campground has resigned from the force after pleading guilty to a lesser charge.

Brandon Clare Robinson, 30, was on unpaid administrative leave from the Lowell Police Department since May. He resigned Monday, police said.

He was charged with third-degree criminal sexual conduct after the alleged 2002 molestation surfaced when the teen, now 18, told his sister.

Robinson pleaded guilty Friday to second-degree child abuse, a four-year felony.

Robinson, a full-time Lowell officer since 2005 who worked part time for more than two years before that, was accused of molesting a teen family friend at a trailer Robinson had at Sandy Pines resort near Hopkins.

During a hearing in May, the teen testified he sometimes would spend the night at the trailer and said he was molested several times over months.

Robinson was not employed with Lowell then, but worked as a part-time Allegan County sheriff's deputy from April 2000 to May 2002.

He pleaded guilty to the child-abuse charge just days before his trial was to begin in Allegan County Circuit Court.

"He had to put his family first," said Robinson's attorney, Frank Stanley. "He has a young child at home."

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Neglect bill is common sense

EDITORIALS

The Michigan Senate is considering a bill to give authorities more power and leeway to deal with parents who leave children alone in vehicles.

Yes, another bill to take up some space in the volumes of legislation Lansing has passed over the years.

Is it necessary? No. But will it do some good? Probably.

Under the bill, sponsored by Rep. Fran Amos, RDWaterford Township, and passed by the House, a parent or guardian cannot "leave a child in a vehicle for a period of time that poses an unreasonable risk of harm or injury to the child or under circumstances that pose an unreasonable risk of harm or injury."

The bill reportedly would be an improvement over current law. To prosecute now, it must be proven that the parents "knowingly and intentionally" left the child in the car or that "serious physical harm" actually resulted from parental negligence.

The proposed change would allow prosecutors to better react to situations, officials say.

Parents who leave their children for just moments to pay for gas or let one child sleep in the car during a sibling's soccer practice would not be charged, assuming the parents keep a close watch on the vehicle.

Violations would be misdemeanors with 93 days in jail and a maximum fine of \$500. If there is "serious physical harm," the violator could face 10 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine. A child's death could result in 15 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Most parents know enough and care enough about their youngsters that they wouldn't leave their children unattended in a car Ñ under any circumstances.

But unfortunately, there are some parents that could be described as, well, just stupid.

It's a shame you need a bill like this to make those few parents think straight and be logical about the care of their kids, but if it helps, it should be passed.

Court fine crackdown working well

Anew Oakland County Circuit Court pilot program that cracks down on unpaid court fines appears to be working. Recently, it was reported that almost every defendant was paying on time.

The five judges participating in the pilot program, which kicked off Dec. 4, tell defendants when they enter a plea or are convicted that they'll have to pay at least a portion of their court costs by the day they're sentenced.

People who don't have a court-appointed attorney are expected to shell out a minimum of \$200, while people who do are asked to pay at least \$500.

Those who don't visit the court's reimbursement division by the end of their sentencing day to pay at least that amount and set up a payment plan for the rest of what is owed face penalties ranging from community service to jail time.

The pilot program was designed to increase the collection rate of fees and fines, and to speed up the court's receipt of the money.

Obviously, this is a good program that should be made permanent, assuming it continues to increase collections.

From a fiscal standpoint, in this time of tight budgets, every penny coming to the county is badly needed.

From a "justice" standpoint, people convicted of various crimes need to quickly fulfill their community obligation and pay their fines and costs.

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Flushing schools to host anti-bullying workshop

by Rene A. Rosencrantz | The Flushing Observer

Wednesday February 20, 2008, 10:04 AM

Flushing -- The Flushing School District next week is hosting another assembly designed to combat bullying. It's the second in a five-part series by the Soul Shoppe, an organization designed to help create bully-free communities.

"We were really pleased with the first assembly which we had in the fall," said Central Elementary Principal Adam Hartley.

At each of the district's four elementary schools, students will review techniques they learned at the first assembly for avoiding being bullied or becoming bullies themselves.

The previous assemblies, which were presented by Soul Shoppe founder Joseph Savage, use interactive video footage to teach children techniques using the acronym FREE:

Flow: Don't let it bother you.

Radar: Find a way to stay safe.

Express: Stand your ground and speak up.

Enough: Know when it's time to ask for help.

Savage will once again be presenting the assemblies.

"We're very fortunate to have the founder presenting the program," Hartley said.

Since Savage's first visited, Hartley said he has witnessed students using the techniques that they learned at the first assembly.

"He talked about letting air out of your balloon before you reach the point where you're going to explode," Hartley said. "I've heard students using that kind of language and we as a staff try to use that language."

On this visit Savage will once again be presenting a program for parents.

School officials are hoping more parents will come to the event, which is set for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 28 at Central Elementary School, 525 Coutant St. The program is open to parents from all the districts elementary schools.

"We're hoping to have more of a turn out this time around," Hartley said.

"This is an issue we can't address alone, we need parents to be involved in it too."

Parent Diane Binkowski said she found the program informative when she attended it last fall.

"It was interesting to see the interactive nature of it," she said. "I think it's something kids would find captivating."

Binkowski said her sons, 12 and 10, have experienced bullying and is glad to see the district doing something about the childhood problem.

"As a parent it really hurts to know your kids are going through that and it is good to see that the school knows it exists and is doing something about it," she said.

Hartley said the district plans to have additional Soul Shoppe assemblies next year.



Wife arraigned in husband's stabbing death

By ART BUKOWSKI

abukowski@record-eagle.com

—

TRAVERSE CITY Michelle Hihnala appeared calm and stood bound in chains as her attorney discussed bond with a judge during her arraignment on second-degree murder and manslaughter charges.

Hihnala, 27, drove up from Tennessee last week when she found out authorities charged her in the July 8 stabbing death of her husband, said her attorney, Clarence Gomery. She has no criminal history and she isn't a flight risk, Gomery contended.

"She wants to answer these charges," Gomery said. "She'll show up to every court date without a problem."

Gomery asked 86th District Judge Michael J. Haley to set bond at 10 percent of \$100,000, but Haley set it at 10 percent of \$250,000, citing the severity of the charges. A preliminary examination, which determines if there is enough evidence to send the case to trial, is tentatively set for Feb. 29.

Second-degree murder carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. Manslaughter carries a 15-year maximum sentence.

Authorities allege Hihnala stabbed her husband, Alan Hihnala, with a kitchen knife during an argument in the couple's East Bay Township home. Michelle Hihnala allegedly told authorities her husband ran into the knife as he physically abused her, court records show.

Gomery, who alleges Alan Hihnala had a history of abusing his wife, expected Michelle Hihnala to post the bond with the help of family members. She was taken to jail following the arraignment.

"We hope to have her released so she can prepare for trial," he said. "It still remains her position that this was either an accident or self-defense."

Alan Hihnala's parents, Alan and Vicki Hihnala, were at the arraignment. They were glad to see the criminal process begin.

"I was really afraid it was going to be brushed under the rug and forgotten," Vicki said. "I don't want her to think it's no big deal to kill somebody. At least she has to take it seriously."

Michelle Hihnala's family declined to comment after the arraignment.

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Photos



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Woman accused of breaking into ex-boyfriend's home

Suspect reportedly maced man as he called police for help

By Michael P. McConnell
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

OAK PARK -- A Detroit woman faces charges of home invasion, felony assault and malicious destruction of property after police say she broke into her ex-boyfriend's house and sprayed him with a can of mace when he refused to let her in.

Neighbors in the 15000 block of James Street called police after they heard the sound of breaking glass about 1:30 a.m. Monday.

The ex-boyfriend was on the phone with police when the woman broke through the picture window, police said.

Erica Thomas, 25, of Detroit, was charged Tuesday in Oak Park 45B District Court and was released on personal bond.

"She apparently had arrived at the victim's house unannounced," said Oak Park Public Safety Lt. Mike Pousak. "She was demanding to be let in but was refused entry."

Thomas then broke the window to get inside the house, Pousak added.

"She decided to break in and confront him," Pousak said. "He was still on the phone with us."

Thomas then produced a can of mace and sprayed her ex-boyfriend as he talked on the phone to Oak Park police, police reported.

"The victim held up his arms when she sprayed the mace at him," Pousak said. "She wasn't able to spray him in the face. She then said her piece and walked out of the apartment."

Police called to the scene arrived just as Thomas was leaving. She was arrested and jailed. She faces charges of first-degree home invasion, a 20-year felony; and felony assault, which is punishable by up to five years in prison. The malicious destruction of property charge is a misdemeanor. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled in Oak Park District Court for 1 p.m. Feb. 26.

"Emotions can run high in these relationship things," Pousak said.

Contact Michael P. McConnell at mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com or at (248) 591-2571.

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February 19, 2008

FIRST SENIOR ABUSE PROTECTION BILL MOVES

The first bill in a package dealing with protecting seniors from physical and financial abuse was reported unanimously by the House Senior Health, Security and Retirement Committee. [HB 5669](#) would allow third parties to file a complaint on behalf of a vulnerable adult they suspect of being abused. The committee took testimony on the legislation last week (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, February 12, 2008](#)), but adding support to the bill Tuesday was AARP and the Greater Michigan Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

The panel also began testimony on its second bill in the package ([HB 5727](#)), which would prohibit a person convicted of a felony regarding abuse, neglect or exploitation from receiving their victim's estate. [Rep. Mark Meadows](#) (D-East Lansing), the bill sponsor, said the current law severs that tie if the person is convicted of murdering a vulnerable adult, but it doesn't speak to what happens if that person abuses or exploits another.

[Rep. John Stahl](#) (R-North Branch) questioned what would happen if the victim and the felon resolve their issues and Mr. Meadows said a substitute being worked on would address that matter so a vulnerable adult could still elect for their estate to go to that person.

While the bill wouldn't help in his particular situation, one man testified that his aunt's housekeeper had the will rewritten so that family members got a minimal portion of her \$750,000 estate. He said there needs to be more background checks and other protections for senior citizens.

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3:01 am, February 18, 2008

DMC, WSU still at odds

WSU seeks review of payment cuts, may sue

By [Jay Greene](#)

Wayne State University's School of Medicine is asking for an independent review to determine whether **Detroit Medical Center** is justified in withholding \$12 million in funds for indigent care and Medicaid.

WSU also is considering a breach of contract lawsuit against the DMC if funding is not restored, said Robert Frank, vice dean of the medical school. The medical school also is working on a plan to reduce expenses, which may include cutting services and research and possibly laying off faculty and staff. A decision is expected this week on the potential lawsuit and layoffs.

"We receive two checks per month with \$500,000 to \$600,000 less each time," Frank said. "We are geared up to look at each job category to see where we can cut. We cannot tolerate this type of cut."

In a Feb. 1 letter, DMC notified WSU it is reducing annual Medicaid disproportionate share payments to the medical school and **Wayne State University Physicians Group** by \$12 million, from \$19 million to \$7 million, retroactive to Oct. 1 because it believes the payments violate federal laws on excessive compensation to doctors.

Disproportionate share payments compensate hospitals and doctors that treat a high number of low-income patients.

WSU has since received two checks from DMC that total less than half what it expected under a 31/2-year-old contract it signed in November 2006, Frank said. WSU is paid twice a month.

"We feel we have a binding contract," Frank said. "Mike Duggan feels like they don't like something in the contract and we are reduced by \$12 million? To me, this is unfair."

DMC President and CEO Mike Duggan told *Crain's* that a legal review DMC paid for concluded that the \$19 million in payments — along with separate state Medicaid payments of \$17 million to treat the same low-income patients — could violate federal laws on excessive compensation to physicians. The review was conducted by law firm **Foley & Lardner** in Detroit.

"We needed to protect ourselves," Duggan said.

Frank said WSU plans to invite the DMC to participate in the legal review. Who would conduct the review is still under consideration.

Duggan said he is willing to meet with WSU to discuss the issues surrounding the payments, but he declined further comment.

Duggan said the payment cut to WSU was made because the medical school last September began receiving enhanced Medicaid payments from the state to care for uninsured patients.

"WSU is getting \$17 million more from the state and \$10 million less from DMC in Medicaid payments," he said. "They are still \$7 million ahead."

James McCurtis, a state Medicaid spokesman, said the payments to WSU doctors are not "double payments" and do not violate federal laws. Medicaid also pays extra money to doctors who treat low-income patients at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Hurley Hospital in Flint. Even when both payment sources are added, doctors still

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are paid below costs, he said.

Frank said at least 19 other states make "enhanced payments" to selected providers for care to Medicaid patients.

While Frank said the DMC's decision to cut payments was implemented without warning, Duggan said WSU was warned.

"We offered to sit down on numerous occasions, and they declined," Duggan said.

WSU General Counsel Louis Lessem said he was informed by DMC lawyers on Jan. 31, two days after the DMC board approved the plan to cut the payments, which DMC receives from the state and shares with WSU under contract.

Keith Crain, editor-in-chief of *Crain's Detroit Business*, is a member of the DMC board.

Frank said WSU also has asked that the money in dispute be placed in an escrow account.

Lessem said DMC's Feb. 1 letter stated that the hospital would "reserve the funds ... I don't know what reserve means. I asked them to put the money in escrow." Duggan declined to comment.

The funding cut could affect research faculty physicians conduct at DMC, WSU and other institutions, Frank said. "We use clinical dollars to support the unfunded portion of research," he said. "These cuts can affect research."

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Walk for Warmth scheduled for March 1

By Anne Sullivan
, The News-Herald

TAYLOR — Life can change quickly.

At Christmastime, employees from Dearborn-based Plastech Engineered Products Inc. came to the Wyandotte-based Wayne-Metropolitan Community Action Agency and adopted some families to help them through the holiday season, said Mia Cupp, the agency's corporate communications director.

"Two weeks ago the company declared bankruptcy, and now those people who were just giving to our clients may find themselves in a place where they are wondering how they will pay their bills or make house payments," Cupp said.

"It's that quick. You (are) laid off, and it doesn't take long before you're in hot water, wondering how you're going to support your family."

Walk for Warmth helps people like that, she said.

The 12th annual Walk for Warmth sponsored by Wayne Metro is set for 9 a.m. to noon March 1 at Southland Center, 23000 Eureka Road.

The goal is to raise \$50,000 for heat and energy-related assistance to Wayne County residents. It is the agency's only annual fund-raiser.

Although the state's economy is bad, Cupp said residents are stepping up to help unlike the agency has seen in the past.

"Things are going real well this year," she said. "It's surprising, considering the economy. We're going into this year's walk with about \$30,000 in donations pledged by corporate and anonymous donors."

That's nearly double the highest level pledged in the past. Cupp isn't sure what has caused the surge in pledges, but is grateful.

"I think people are paying attention to needs in their community because it's kind of seeping into the middle class, hitting their friends, family and neighbors," she said.

A lot of people have lost their jobs or have family members or friends who have lost jobs, she said. There are people in need in a way they have never been before.

"I think people who wouldn't have normally paid attention to the issue are," she said.

She also credits television coverage for this year's walk, and in September, Louis Pizker took over as chief executive officer.

"He's a Downriver resident," Cupp said. "He is kind of a hometown guy who has been invested in this community his whole life.

"He is making an effort to get out in the community, show people his face, connect with them, and I think people appreciate that, pay attention to it and are appreciative of his efforts, and that's paying off."

When people realize times are getting hard, there is a genuine interest in helping those in need and who are living paycheck to paycheck, she said.

"The people we help aren't all on assistance," Cupp said. "They aren't all receiving welfare checks. They are people who are working two and three jobs. The breadwinner in the household maybe took a buyout, and that money doesn't go very far.

"A lot of people are coming to us. They're just embarrassed. They feel terrible that they have to ask for help. They never had to do this before."

The agency receives money from the federal and state governments for utility assistance, Cupp said. But, not everyone in need meets the criteria established by the government.

"If you don't meet the criteria because you don't have a child, or are over the (income) limit by \$1, or your furnace is broken, those moneys can't help you," she said.

In some cases, clients have to pay \$200 toward a bill or \$400 toward a combined bill to be eligible for assistance, she said. Some clients don't have the money.

"The walk helps them," she said.

It's a safety net to keep people from falling through the cracks, she said. And, all the money collected stays in Wayne County.

The agency receives matching funds from The Heat and Warmth fund and the Michigan Public Service Commission, she said.

"We always run out of money before the need is up," Cupp said.

"We've had families become homeless because (they can't pay) utilities. You can't stay in (a) house in the freezing cold with children or by yourself without utilities; you have to go to shelters. This is a way to prevent people from being put out in the streets."

Walk for Warmth is three kilometers, about 15 laps around the mall, with people there to direct walkers, she said.

The agency asks a minimum donation of \$15 per person in the walk. People can walk individually or in teams.

They will gather at the stage between Macy's and Olga's Kitchen.

Anyone interested in participating can sign up to Walk for Warmth at www.waynemetrol.org. Click the "donate" button.

Also, to collect donations, participants can create a free Web page at www.firstgiving.com/Waynemetrol.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.thenewsherald.com/stories/022008/loc_20080220005.shtml



Walkers step up to help keep others warm

Event raises funds for heating emergencies

By Barb Pert Templeton
Voice Reporter

Nobody should have to choose between feeding their family or paying the heating bill to stay warm this winter. Keeping those folks in mind, several hundred people are expected to take part in the Macomb County Community Service Agencies' (MCCSA) 18th annual Walk for Warmth this weekend.

The walk raises funds to assist low-income families and individuals with home heating emergencies such as furnace repair/replacement and utility assistance. These families, who find themselves in dire straits financially, prompt a bigger need than ever before for county agencies that strive to help them out, MCCSA Director Frank Taylor said.

"Certainly we've seen quite a rise in the need to provide families with services, that population is growing rapidly.

"We find people in the quote unquote middle-income level who have lost their jobs, through no fault of their own, and it's often related to the auto industry."

The MCCSA Walk for Warmth is Saturday at St. Therese of Lisieux Church, 48115 Schoenherr Road in Shelby Township. Registration starts at 9 a.m. with the walk taking off at 10 a.m.

The cost to participate is a minimum pledge of \$10 but many participants have collected money in advance using an application form designed for pledges. A light breakfast is available before the walk and a box lunch plus door prizes are given away after the walk.

Sponsorships and pledges help raise funds for the Walk for Warmth with some walkers raising \$1,000 annually, several more bring in \$500 each, but the majority gather smaller amounts. Most participants raise their money before the walk and on the day of the event they turn in the donations collected. All ages, from seniors to children in strollers were part of the three-mile event.

"We really like to have this outside at this time of year just so people can get a feel for what's happening to some of those in need right now," Taylor said. "And we do get a spike in participation if it's not raining or extra cold."

Last year's event saw 250 walkers turn out. Another 30 to 40 volunteers set up and served food.

"We have seen an increase in the number of people participating and it seems

to be related to their becoming sensitive to the needs in our community now," Taylor said.

All good news for those seeking help from the county. Taylor said MCCSA has a combination of funding sources, including programs through the state, which provide them with resources to help those in need, but not everyone always qualifies for those dollars. The agencies ability to help also hinges on the amount of funds they have been given.

"We want to maximize our opportunities to help and some might not qualify for what we have," Taylor said.

"These funds (from Walk for Warmth) are used as a last resort for those who don't qualify for other types of services," MCCSA Communication Specialist Julie Hintz said. "For those who may otherwise fall between the cracks."

The walk usually generates between \$30,000 to \$35,000 annually. Those dollars are utilized to replace or repair furnaces and sometimes to help a client pay a utility bill for heat. The 2007 walk raised \$31,150.

"All of these funds are specifically used to help low-income families; they are not for operating costs," Taylor said.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.voicenews.com/stories/021308/loc_20080213001.shtml



02/19/2008

Group eyes Sleeper mansion for youth shelter/museum

Kate Hessling , The Huron Daily Tribune

BAD AXE — Ken Guza is not giving up the fight to provide a safe and secure facility for homeless young men needing stability and assistance in making life work for them.

And over the past year, he's found himself fighting for another cause — rescuing the Gov. Albert E. Sleeper mansion.

Advertisement

"We have two goals: Rescuing this building and rescuing kids," said Guza, who also is the head cook/food services supervisor for Bad Axe Public Schools.

Guza formed Kenny's Inc. last year in efforts to give an ever growing number of roofless young men in the area some shelter and training to take control of their lives.

"We're going to do it — some how, some way," he said.

The goal was to purchase a two-story farm house on 9 acres of land outside of town on the west side of Bad Axe to serve as a youth homeless shelter.

But, within two weeks after Kenny's Inc. publicly announced it was applying for grants and looking for donations to fund the project, the property was sold.

"So now we want the former governor's mansion," Guza said.

The mansion, which was built in 1917, is zoned commercial/residential and can be renovated to accommodate between seven and 10 occupants — not counting the staff who would be on the premises 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Guza said.

He said to fund the shelter, half of the mansion would be converted into a museum and the other half would be used to house homeless young men between the ages of 16 and 24.

The facility also would include a cafeteria like area that would be used for various parties and receptions booked at the museum, Guza said.

He said the Sleeper mansion would be an ideal location to have the shelter because it would not only serve as a safe place for displaced young men in the area, but it would also preserve a very important historical building.

"The house itself is a historical landmark," Guza said.

The shelter would be trans-permanent supportive housing in nature, meaning the young adults would be provided with safe, affordable housing along with services and supports like independent living programs.

This type of "permanent" supportive housing is not permanent in the traditional sense of the word, Guza said.

The program doesn't force the young adults to move on prematurely, instead it's geared toward helping the youth develop and/or improve independent living skills, he said.

"Paramount to these youth 'moving on' is successful completion of a secondary education, basic life skills, interpersonal skill building, job preparation and attainment, education and counseling on substance abuse, mental and physical health care services and post-secondary training," reads Kenny's Inc.'s model of supportive housing.

Kenny's Inc.'s model of trans-permanent supportive housing incorporates nine needs that must be met. They include safe and affordable housing; a relationship with at least one responsible, trustworthy adult; consistent emotional support; an opportunity to learn and practice independent living skills; career counseling and guidance; continuing education; job-readiness training and occupational skills development; medical and dental care; and access to mental health services.

Guza has spent the last year applying for grants through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA).

“Everyone of them have been rejected,” he said.

The most recent rejection letter, which was sent Feb. 4, 2008, said the project was denied funding because although the proposal was “very worthwhile,” it “did not meet threshold requirements to receive consideration at this time.”

The letter, written by Sally Harrison, Office of Supportive Housing and Homeless Initiatives director, said “many applicants were received for these limited funds” and that Kenny’s Inc.’s “participation in the application is truly appreciated.”

Guza said he understands the state has a lot of different people and organizations applying for the roughly \$3 million in grant monies allocated, but it’s still hard when there are kids in the area who don’t have homes.

“We still have homeless kids, with no safe and secure ... place for them to rest their head,” he said.

While there are many who don’t believe there are homeless kids in the area, Guza said he’s seen first hand that they exist. In fact, he’s provided shelter to five area youths.

Since Kenny’s Inc. hasn’t had any luck getting grant money from the state, Guza said he’s appealing to the public, those who can afford to donate some money to help provide area youths with a shelter and help preserve the Sleeper mansion because it’s an important piece of local and state history.

He said he also plans to hold fund raisers to come up with the needed \$25,000 for a down payment on the mansion, which is listed for sale for \$120,000.

Kenny’s Inc. is a Michigan non-profit and received IRS designation as a 501(c)(3) Dec. 7, 2006. As a result, any donations would be tax deductible, Guza said.

George Lauinger, Department of Natural Resources unit supervisor at Sleeper State Park, said he’s interested in the fate of the Sleeper mansion, and he himself has tried contacting sources in Lansing to try to find some sort of funding to preserve the building. Unfortunately, he said he hasn’t had much luck.

“Which is understandable ... money is really tight with the current budget situation,” said Lauinger, noting there is no formal correlation between Sleeper State Park and the Sleeper mansion, though Sleeper State Park did get its name from the former governor who is considered the grandfather of the state’s park system.

Lauinger said as a person interested in the building’s history, he’s glad to hear someone’s trying to preserve the Sleeper mansion.

“That’s just great news,” he said. “ ... It sounds like a perfect chance to save the house.”

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Jobless rates up in December

Tuesday, February 19, 2008 10:59 AM EST

Seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates increased over the month in 13 of Michigan's 17 major labor market areas, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

In December, total employment and labor force levels declined seasonally in most regions.

"Michigan's local labor markets displayed typical seasonal changes in December," said Rick Waclawek, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "During 2007, preliminary annual averages show that most Michigan regions recorded labor force and employment reductions and slight jobless rate increases."

From November to December, jobless rate increases in the 13 regions averaged only 0.3 of a percentage point, with relatively large increases in four areas and minor advances in the remaining regions.

Unemployment rate hikes in the state's three northernmost regions ranged from 0.6 to 1.3 percentage points, while the rate in the Detroit-Warren-Livonia Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) rose by 0.8 of a percentage point over the month.

Rate gains in the remaining regions were limited to 0.4 of a percentage point or less.

Unemployment rates were unchanged over the month in the Ann Arbor, Flint and Monroe MSAs, while the rate in the Muskegon-Norton Shores MSA edged downward by 0.1 of a percentage point.

Preliminary annual average data indicated that jobless rates moved upward in 14 of the state's 17 major labor market areas from 2006 to 2007.

FROM OUR READERS

DETROIT FREE PRESS

FEBRUARY 20, 2008

The cure for poverty starts with children

On behalf of Michigan's Children, I thank Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed and the Free Press for putting poverty back on the state's agenda. But I have an issue with Sunday's "On Point" presentation: Neither the editorial nor Jeff Gerritt's column on attacking poverty mentioned children ("Cities now and tomorrow: Poverty," Feb. 17).

There are something like 500,000 poor children in Michigan, nearly one in five kids. This is the population of children that feeds the cycle of poverty over generations.

These are the children who are not likely to receive the single most important program that could lift them out of poverty: a good, quality early education, from ages 0-5.

Most of these children will be in day care (or babysat by grandparents) for significant portions of their lives. Such settings are unlikely to help children learn the knowledge-building tools they'll need by the time they get to school. These children -- our children -- will begin their formal education in kindergarten already two or three steps behind peers whose parents could afford high quality day care.

Long-term studies by Ypsilanti-based High Scope prove convincingly that children who get a high quality early childhood education are far more likely to become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, contributing to society and building successful families.

The kids who don't get such enriching pre-K opportunities are among those who go on to fail grades, drop out (or be expelled) from school, and become

juvenile delinquents, substance abusers, unemployed adults, deadbeat parents and criminals.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has taken a positive step to expand early childhood educational opportunities for children in her proposed 2009 budget. But the \$31.5 million she has requested will help only about 7,000 children. Thousands more need it.

Given the tremendous costs that Michigan taxpayers are shouldering to provide housing, food and health services to thousands of prison inmates and juvenile delinquents, shouldn't we do more to help the babies and toddlers of poor families grow up to be healthy and smart enough to compete in this global economy?

Jack Kresnak

President/CEO, Michigan's Children

Lansing

Plans for DHS relocation seem to be scrapped

2/7/2008 5:28:14 AM

by Peter Jakey-- Managing Editor

It's been nearly a year since officials from the Department of Human Services (DHS) announced that they would be seeking a new location for Presque Isle County's office, as a way to save the state agency money. After expending numerous hours of time and energy, it appears there will be no relocation of the West Third Street, Rogers City office.



There could be some changes to the office space at the current building, but no move, according to Doug McCombs, DHS director for Presque Isle and Alpena counties. To avoid a consolidation with the Alpena office, and to keep a DHS physical presence in Presque Isle County, local governing officials were looking for a new location with little or no rent.

MCCOMBS SAID the Onaway Area Community Schools was the most promising location, before the Department of Management and Budget (DMB), the agency pushing for cost-saving measures and the closing of DHS offices across the state, put the brakes on any relocation plans locally, and instead turned their attention to reconfiguring the Rogers City office building. DMB directed local DHS officials to find a way to reduce the usage of their square footage. McCombs submitted a new floor plan to DMB last fall, but all has been quiet since then. "They appear to have reached a conclusion that they are not going to push us to co-locate, or do anything other than try to reduce the amount of square footage we are currently leasing from the current land owner, thereby coming up with a savings," said McCombs. "I think we are safe in terms of our current location for as far down the road as I can see." Since sending in the floor plan last fall, McCombs hasn't heard any news or been asked to do anything else by the DMB. He said the new floor plan would offer enough space for the current employees.

“THAT IS something we struggled with all along -- that we don’t want to just have a presence in Presque Isle County, we want our full compliment of staff to remain there so we can function as we have been,” said McCombs. The proposed floor plan would include relocating the break room/lunch room and cutting a conference room and adjoining offices. The plan would be to convert a room used for the storage of filing cabinets as a break room/lunchroom and moving the filing cabinets into a large manager’s office. The current front entrance, reception desk, and waiting room would remain in its current location, although some of the waiting room may be used for storage of other items with the loss of space on the other end of the building.

“If they go with that, we would be giving up space but keeping all of our people,” said McCombs. He added that there are some details that would need to be worked out, including a possible renegotiation of the terms of the lease. McCombs said the only positive is they are no longer investing their time looking for a new building. The bad part is final plans, if there are going to be any, are still in limbo.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Colleen Steinman or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7374

Higher education opportunities for foster youths are growing; Universities offer scholarships and assistance for unique needs of foster youths aging out of care

Feb. 20, 2008

Michigan's foster youths aging out of care will find it easier to pursue a college education thanks to a series of scholarships and other programs specifically geared to meet the needs of these young adults.

Foster youths can get help filling out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid form at Wayne State University from 2-4 p.m. on Saturday, Feb.

23 at the David Adamany Undergraduate Library, 5200 Anthony Wayne Drive in

Detroit. This organization also offered free assistance to all students in filling out the application at 27 locations across Michigan on Feb. 10.

"This is one of the few locations in the nation that has a session set aside for the specific needs of foster youths," said Kate Hanley, director the Michigan Department of Human Service's foster care permanency program. "We want as many foster youths as possible to complete these forms so they can receive the financial support to reach their educational goal."

About 500 young people leave Michigan's foster care system each year. Studies show that, while 70 percent report that they aspire to attend college, only about 20 percent actually enroll and only a quarter of these students ever complete a degree.

"The needs of foster youths are vastly different from the average college

student," Hanley said. "Former foster youths often become homeless when dorms close for the holidays. Even applying for financial aid presents a unique challenge for foster youths."

In addition to financial aid, Michigan universities are beginning to recognize the need for scholarships and other supports for foster children who are or have been in care.

The University of Michigan again is offering an average of \$5,000 each year for undergraduates who have been part of the foster care system, are orphans or wards of the court. The Paul and Amy Blavin Scholars Fund, established in 2006, provided five young women support for college during its first year. The donors permanently endowed the scholarship in December and hope to expand the number of awards to as many 12 each year.

"The University of Michigan is committed to holding open its doors to students from all backgrounds, because their experiences enrich our academic atmosphere," U-M President Mary Sue Coleman said. "We are pleased to help foster youths with access to a transformative University of Michigan education."

Western Michigan University recently announced its Foster Youth and Higher Education Initiative to offer a series of support services for foster youths. The initiative includes the John Seita Scholarship, a four-year full-tuition award for qualified foster care youths who have aged out of care, as well as year-round, on-campus housing available for those students.

"At Western Michigan University, we are passionate about insuring that no segment of our society is kept from having access to higher education," WMU President John M. Dunn said. "With its broad range of programs, excellent faculty and strong support systems, we are well positioned to help these youths achieve their goals."

In April 2007, the Department of Human Services co-sponsored the first Foster Care-Higher Education summit at Albion College to help make colleges

and universities more aware of the unique needs of foster youths transitioning out of foster care. There have been two follow-up summits at Madonna College and Western Michigan University and a third is planned at Central Michigan University this month. DHS also administers the Michigan Education and Training Voucher program, which allows youths who were in foster care on or after their 14th birthday to access up to \$5,000 each year for educational expenses.

"I'm very grateful for the support and leadership Michigan's colleges and universities have shown for the youths in foster care," DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said. "Helping these young people become successful, productive adults will continue to pay dividends long into the future."

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.michigan.gov/fyit

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Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

DHS awards \$236,275 for low-income tax assistance

Feb. 19, 2008

As many as 8,900 low-income Michigan residents will receive free tax assistance through 12 community organizations and nonprofit entities funded by Michigan Department of Human Services. The grantees will help low-income households in their service areas acquire Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax benefits. The grant period is January-June 2008.

"The Earned Income Tax Credit is one of the best anti-poverty tools," said Ismael Ahmed, director of Michigan Department of Human Services.

"Families can receive more than \$4,000, depending on the number of dependents and their income. They can use the credit or benefit to erase debt, pay winter heating bills, put a down payment on a house, or any other use."

Federal EITC benefits for families with children range up to \$4,716 for the 2007 tax season. A single person without children can qualify for as much as \$428. See www.michiganeic.org for more information.

For a list of grantees, go to:

http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5458_7691_7752-185746--,00.html

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

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